DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 433 268 SO 030 984

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TITLE Citizenship Education in Slovak Education.
PUB DATE 1999-02-09
NOTE 9p.
PUB TYPE Reports - Descriptive (141)
EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Citizenship Education; Curriculum Development; *Democracy; *Democratic Values; Elementary Secondary Education; Foreign Countries; Social Studies
IDENTIFIERS *Slovakia; Velvet Revolution (Czechoslovakia 1989)

ABSTRACT

The present-day curriculum for citizenship education in Slovakia was developed after changes in the political situation brought on by the 1989 Velvet Revolution. The new curriculum reflects refocus from totalitarian indoctrination to education which aims to prepare students for participation in a democratic society. In this document the main objectives and curriculum strategies of Slovakian citizenship courses for public schools are delineated. These courses include compulsory citizenship education for all grades of vocational schools and for three grades of the secondary professional schools, compulsory social science for the 3rd and 4th grades of gymnasia and the 6th to 9th grades of elementary schools, and optional social sciences seminars for secondary professional students and 4th grade gymnasium students. Some cross-curricular aspects are included in geography, history, and Slovak literature courses at all grade levels. Content, methods, and general timetables of civic education are prescribed on a national level. Curriculum conveying the citizenship theme is discussed, and information is given regarding pedagogical methods, didactic aids, and teacher training strategies. (MM)

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by Erich Mistrik

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Citizenship Education In Slovak Education

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1. Main objectives

Present-day curriculum for Slovak citizenship education is relatively new one. It was developed anew during 1992-1992 for all level of Slovak educational system. This change was caused by totally new political situation of the country appearing after the *Velvet Revolution* that took place on November 1989. The citizenship education had to be renewed from totalitarian ideological indoctrination into education for democratic society.

The curricula were developed by expert group composed by the Ministry of Education. The group includes in-service teachers, teachers-advisors, and academicians from teacher education colleges/universities. The curricula were developed for all types and levels of schools in the same time. Consequently, all parts of curriculum posses the same face, very similar and interconnected content. The main difference is between gymnasia (preparing students particularly for entering universities and colleges) on the one side - and vocational + professional schools (preparing students for industry, agriculture, business, services, and for all branches of practical life) on the other side. Also curricula for elementary are different in that sense that they include more simple topics and are devoted more to „upbringing" children then giving knowledge to children.

The new curriculum came into being from the 1st September 1993. It was renewed according to new needs - a year more devoted for the course called Civic Education was included into elementary schools curricula from the 1 st September 1997.

Education related to the theme of citizenship in Slovak schools is centralized into specialized courses (see below). Main objectives of these education activities are:

- To make students aware of basic ideas, structures, and concepts of selected humanities as well as selected social sciences, i.e., politology, law, economy,

psychology, sociology, theory of religion, aethetics, philosophy + selected topics like human rights and rights of children, and etiquette.

- To develop students morally and intellectually as responsible and informed citizens.

- To develop students' abilities in arguing, asking questions, understanding and tolerance.

2. Curriculum strategy

Organizing strategy

Curricula are organized into specialized courses:

1. Compulsory *Citizenship Education* for all grades of vocational schools (there are two or three or four years of study in this type of secondary schools).

2. a) Compulsory *Citizenship Education* for three grades of the secondary professional schools (there are four years of study in this type of secondary schools; the course is valid for the 2nd, 3rd and 4th grades).

b) Optional *Social Sciences Seminar* for the same type of schools (valid for the last grade, i.e., the 4th grade).

3. a) Compulsory *Social Science* for the 3rd and 4th grades of gymnasia (there are four years of study in this type of secondary schools).

b) Optional *Social Sciences Seminar* for the last (the 4th) grade of gymnasia.

4. Compulsory *Civic Education* from 6th to 9th grades of elementary schools.

Some cross-curricular aspects of citizenship are included into such subjects as *Geography, History* and *Slovak Literature* in all types and all grades

Main Objectives

There are very similar for all courses.

1. *Citizenship education* for vocational schools

The course is aimed to developing of self-awareness o students, to understanding relations of individual to society, to understanding democracy, freedom, and humanity. At the end of the course students should be informed about and oriented in ethic, aesthetics, juridical and social topics.

2. a) *Citizenship Education* for secondary professional schools

The course is aimed to informing students about basic ideas and concepts of selected social sciences. It is to give students orientation in ethical, aesthetic, psychological, social, juridical, political, and philosophical topics. At the end of the

course students are informed about above mentioned social sciences structures; they are able to ask questions related to the sciences; they are able to develop their own personal opinions related to the citizenship.

b) *Social Sciences Seminar* for secondary professional schools

Students particularly interested in humanities and/or social sciences can prescribe this seminar. It is to broaden and deepen their knowledge, to systematize and to generalize knowledge gained during the course mentioned under 2a). The course is strictly selective in goals and content - being devoted to special needs of respective students. It should also deepen students' abilities in writing essays and in expressing their opinion in speech or writing.

3. a) *Social Science* for gymnasia

It should give to students information on and orientation in psychological, social, juridical, economical, political, and philosophical questions. As compared to other courses this one is much more oriented to developing intellectual abilities of students, at developing students' arguing. Students should also gain much deeper knowledge of inner structure of social science and/or humanities than in other similar courses.

b) *Social Sciences Seminar* for gymnasia

The main objective are the same as of the course mentioned under 2b). Students particularly interested in humanities and/or social sciences can prescribe this seminar. It should broaden, deepen, and systematize their knowledge gained during basic compulsory course *Social Sciense*. The course should reach particular needs of students. It should deepen students' abilities in expressing opinions in speech and/or writing.

4. *Civic Education* for elementary schools

It is aimed at development of knowledge on humanity, moral issues and on democracy. It is also aimed at developing civic skills and abilities in such fields as economic activity of future citizens, in understanding political + legal issues. Also consumer education is included.

Curricula prescribe the content, methods and very general timetable of civic education and all of this is valid on a national level. Not to mention some private schools which have developed their own civic education curricula. The contents, methods and goals of these curricula are very similar to the mentioned above. The main difference lies in timetable and structuring of teaching load. These private curricula should be and are approved by Ministry of Education.

Nevertheless, teachers teaching on the basis of national curriculum are allowed to change up to 30 % of any curriculum - despite of regional, personal or class particularities.

Coordination procedures

Although here are specialized courses for citizenship education in Slovak secondary schools, citizenship education is included into *History, Geography* and *Slovak Literature* courses as well. Citizenship education is not the main part of these subjects. Therefore the co-ordination is very weak - it is based only on general aims of the whole curricula prepared by the Ministry of Education group. These general aims are common to all subjects, i.e., also to citizenship education courses and "non-citizenship" education courses as well. Teachers themselves are asked to make connections between different subjects - in the direction to developing patriotism, international understanding, and citizenship responsibility of students.

3. Curriculum conveying the citizenship theme

Curriculum for different courses (see above) is closely connected. Contents of respective courses can be hardly separated each from another. The subjects and contents included into curriculum are very similar. For this reason, information presented in this paragraph is not divided into subparagraphs on the basis of respective courses. Almost al the subjects as well as content areas are valid for almost all the courses mentioned in paragraph No. 2.

Main conveying subjects

All parts of present-day Slovak curriculum for citizenship education are divided into subjects based on branches of social sciences and/or humanities, i.e., into

- problems of psychology, problems of sociology, problems of economy, problems of state and government, problems of general politology, problems of philosophy, problems of law, problems of theory of religion, problems of logic.

This relatively strict division is planned particularly for gymnasia courses in citizenship. Vocational and professional schools use curriculum that is more flexible and "emphatic" to real life questions, e.g., individual person versus society, social aspects of family life, consumer rights, etc. Elementary schools use curricula that mainly in the 6th and 7th grades work on the topics not on disciplines. The 8th and 9th grades are mostly devoted to of legal issues and to basic economic knowledge.

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4. Pedagogical methods

Conventional teaching

Many teachers in Slovakia still understand Civic Education as just teaching information and knowledge of some categories of social sciences and/or of selected facts. The real upbringing of students as future citizens is many times neglected. Therefore conventional teaching methods are widely utilized. This considered mainly teaching psychology, sociology, economy, legal issues and politology. The connventional methods include mainly: explanation given by a teacher, memorizing done by students, checking their knowledge with the help of oral examination and final classification. This way of teaching is important mainly in those schools in which civic education subjects are classified. The classification is not common to all schools. Schools can choose - either classification of civic education subjects in numbers 1-5[1] or giving feedback to students just orally. Classification in numbers is connected mainly to conventional teaching.

Active teaching / learning methods

Current civic education in Slovakia is devoted mainly to developing students' moral, intellectual responsibility and to developing students' arguing, understanding and tolerance. Therefore active teaching and learning process is slowly spreading over the whole country. Even if larger parts teachers community is still not used to such methods.

Active teaching (where it is applied) is based on group work or on playing roles or on solving basic model situations. During the last years a rich variety of new and flexible didactic tools are being use more and more. Teachers began to use out-of-school activities, e.g., excursions, visits to institutions, interviews and discussions with selected guests. All of them are closely connected to the curricula topics.

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[1] The numbers stand for levels of competence, No.1 being the best, No. 5 being the worst competence.

5. Didactic aids

Most utilized conventional aids

On the basis of new curricula for civic education developed for Slovak schools (see point 1 of the Main objectives) new textbooks are being published. It is a set of textbooks intended to cover all parts and aspects of civic education curriculum. The list of textbooks follows (in alphabetical order):

Secondary schools: History of Philosophy, Introduction to Aesthetics and Etiquette, Introduction to Economy and Economics, Introduction to Ethics, Introduction to Family and Sexual Life, Introduction to Law, Introduction to Politology, Introduction to Psychology, Introduction to Sociology, Philosophy, Dictionary of the Humanities

Elementary Schools: Civic Education for the 6th Grade, ... for the 7th Grade, ... for the 8th Grade, for the 9th Grade.

All of them are specially designed by Slovak authors for present-day civic education curriculum. Only *Philosophy* (i.e., systematic philosophy) was translated from Austrian original. Some of them are more conventional. The other ones are making use of new didactic approaches - games, role playing, interviewing parents by students, solving model situations, etc. (Particularly Introduction to Aesthetics and Etiquette, Introduction to Family and Sexual Life, Introduction to Ethics).

Special handbook for teachers of elementary schools was published - Methodics of Teaching Civics.

Special worksheets are not widely used. They are not being prepared on a national level, nor on a regional levels generally. Only some regional Methodic Centres can prepare such worksheets for schools but rarely for civic education Only a few of teachers in Slovakia are able to prepare such worksheets and are using them regularly. Videos are used more during the last years but still not too much. Used are mainly feature films or selected videos from TV news. Teachers are using them for showing examples of political behavior and/or of social relations.

6. Teacher training strategy

Teachers for citizenship education (i.e., for teaching specialized Civic Education subjects) are educated at university level Their study consists of five years ending with master degree. Prospective teachers are being prepared both for primary and secondary school levels. There is no strict differentiation between preparing teachers for respective school levels. Teachers are being prepared by specialized set of courses

called *Civic Education* or *Philosophy*. Non of these can be studied alone. Each university or college offers this set of course only in combination with different ones, e.g. with courses in history, in Slovak language.

Curriculum content

The content of teacher training is closely connected to civic education curriculum. Training is divided into two main areas - theoretical and practical one. In theoretical courses teachers gain knowledge of basic humanities and social sciences involved in civic education: politology, sociology, economics, law, ethics, history of religions, philosophy, aesthetics, philosophy of history. Teacher training at philosophy departments is much more oriented oriented to philosophy than at any other department.

In practical set of courses teachers gain knowledge, develop skills and abilities in didactic of civic education and they attend social-psychological courses. A lot of teaching practice in classes is included in their study during the 3rd, 4th and 5th year of study. Teaching practice is divided into two parts: a) just attending classes and haring in-service teachers teaching, b) teaching by themselves in classes.

In-service training

In-service teacher training, refreshment and requalification courses are widely used in Slovakia. For civic education teachers there are some practically oriented courses taking place. They are organized by different institutions - regional school administrations, methodical centers, non-governmental organization and foundations.

These courses are mainly directed to two goals:

a) various theoretical as well as practical aspects of participating democracy;

b) new didactic approach.

Bratislava, 9th February 1999